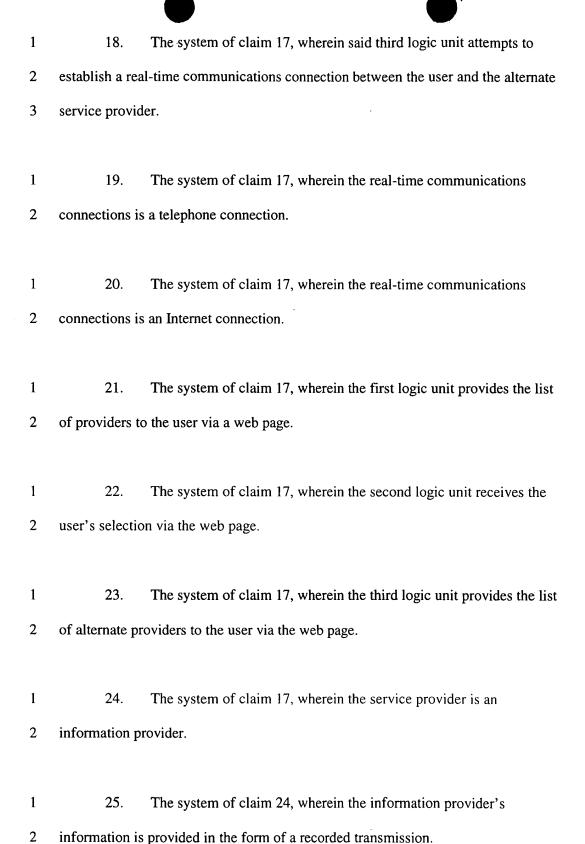CLAIMS

What is claimed is:
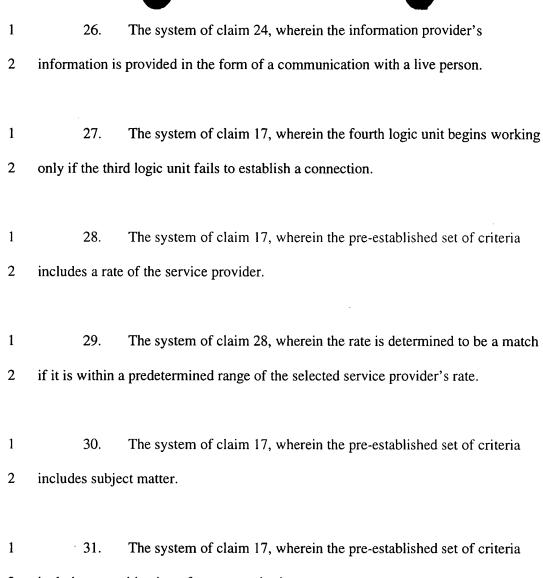
1   1.   A system, the system comprising:

2   a first logic unit to provide a list of service providers to a user, indicating the

3 availability of that provider;

4   a second logic unit to receive the user's selection of a service provider;

5   a third logic unit to attempt to establish a real-time communications

6 connection between the user and a selected service provider; and

7   a fourth logic unit to search a database of service providers for an alternate

8 service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria and to offer the user an

9 option of connecting with an alternate service provider.

1   2.   The system of claim 1, wherein the fourth logic unit presents the

2 alternate service provider if the user fails to connect with the selected service

3 provider.

1   3.   The system of claim 1, wherein the fourth logic unit presents the

2 alternate service provider after the user has completed a communication with the

3 selected service provider

1   4.   The system of claim 1, wherein the service provider is an information

2 provider.

1   5.   The system of claim 4, wherein the information provider's

2   information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1   6.   The system of claim 4, wherein the information provider's

2   information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1   7.   The system of claim 1, wherein the user's selection of a service

2   provider is received over a telephone connection.

1   8.   The system of claim 1, wherein the user's selection of a service

2   provider is received over an Internet connection.

1   9.   The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria

2   includes a rate of the service provider.

1   10.   The system of claim 9, wherein the rate is determined to be a match if

2   it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1   11.   The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria

2   includes subject matter.

1   12.   The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria

2   includes a combination of separate criteria.

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1   13.   The system of claim 1, wherein a system administrator establishes the

2   set of criteria.

1   14.   The system of claim 1, wherein a user establishes the set of criteria.

1   15.   The system of claim 1, wherein the pre-established set of criteria

2   includes a reliability factor.

1   16.   The system of claim 15, wherein the reliability factor consists of a

2   ratio of successful connections between service provider and previous users to total

3   attempts between the service provider and previous users.

1   17.   A system for establishing a real-time communication connection

2   between two parties, the system comprising:

3   a communications interface; and

4   a controller computer linked with the communications interface, the

5   controller computer having:

6   a first logic unit to provide a list of service providers to a user, indicating the

7   availability of that provider;

8   a second logic unit to receive the user's selection of a service provider;

9   a third logic unit to attempt to establish a real-time communications

10   connection between the user and a selected service provider; and

11   a fourth logic unit to search a database of service providers for an alternate

12   service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria and to offer the user an

13   option of connecting with an alternate service provider.

1   18.   The system of claim 17, wherein said third logic unit attempts to

2   establish a real-time communications connection between the user and the alternate

3   service provider.

1   19.   The system of claim 17, wherein the real-time communications

2   connections is a telephone connection.

1   20.   The system of claim 17, wherein the real-time communications

2   connections is an Internet connection.

1   21.   The system of claim 17, wherein the first logic unit provides the list

2   of providers to the user via a web page.

1   22.   The system of claim 17, wherein the second logic unit receives the

2   user's selection via the web page.

1   23.   The system of claim 17, wherein the third logic unit provides the list

2   of alternate providers to the user via the web page.

1   24.   The system of claim 17, wherein the service provider is an

2   information provider.

1   25.   The system of claim 24, wherein the information provider's

2   information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1 26. The system of claim 24, wherein the information provider's

2 information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1 27. The system of claim 17, wherein the fourth logic unit begins working

2 only if the third logic unit fails to establish a connection.

1 28. The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria

2 includes a rate of the service provider.

1 29. The system of claim 28, wherein the rate is determined to be a match

2 if it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1 30. The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria

2 includes subject matter.

1 31. The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria

2 includes a combination of separate criteria.

1 32. The system of claim 17, wherein a system administrator establishes

2 the set of criteria.

1 33. The system of claim 17, wherein a user establishes the set of criteria.

1   34.   The system of claim 17, wherein the fourth logic unit offers the

2   option of connecting the user to the alternate service provider after communication

3   has ceased with the selected service provider.

1   35.   The system of claim 17, wherein the pre-established set of criteria

2   includes a reliability factor.

1   36.   The system of claim 35, wherein the reliability factor consists of a

2   ratio of successful connections between service provider and previous users to total

3   attempts between the service provider and previous users.

1   37.   A method comprising:

2   sending a user a list of service providers with their availability indicated;

3   receiving from the user a selection of a service provider;

4   attempting to establish real-time communications between the user and the

5   selected service provider; and

6   offering the user an option to connect to an alternate provider.

1   38.   The method of claim 37, wherein the selected service provider

2   designates an alternate service provider in advance.

1   39.   The method of claim 37, further including searching a database of

2   service providers for alternate providers who match the selected service provider

3   based on a pre-established set of criteria.

1   40.   The method of claim 37, wherein the connection established between

2   the service provider and the user is a telephone connection.

1   41.   The method of claim 37, wherein the connection established between

2   the service provider and the user is an Internet connection.

1   42.   The method of claim 37, wherein the database is searched and

2   information about an alternate service provider is sent only if the user fails to

3   connect to the selected service provider.

1   43.   The method of claim 37, wherein the option to connect to said

2   alternate service provider is sent after the connection between the user and the

3   service provider ends.

1   44.   The method of claim 37, wherein the service provider is an

2   information provider.

1   45.   The method of claim 44, wherein the information provider's

2   information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1   46.   The method of claim 44, wherein the information provider's

2   information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1   47.   The method of claim 37, wherein rate is a criterion by which an

2   alternate service provider is matched.

1   48.   The method of claim 47, wherein a rate is determined to be a match if

2   it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1   49.   The method of claim 48, wherein the user determines the range of

2   rates that match.

1   50.   The method of claim 48, wherein a system administrator determines

2   the range of rates that match.

1   51.   The method of claim 37, wherein subject matter is a criterion by

2   which an alternate service provider is matched.

1   52.   The method of claim 37, wherein a combination of criteria is used to

2   determine a match.

1   53.   The method of claim 37, wherein a system administrator establishes

2   the criteria by which a match is determined.

1   54.   The method of claim 37, wherein the user establishes the criteria by

2   which a match is determined.

1   55.   The method of claim 37, wherein only service providers that pass a

2   reliability criterion are considered.

1   56.   The method of claim 55, wherein reliability is determined based on a

2 ratio of the number of calls answered by a service provider to the number of calls

3 placed to the service provider.

1   57.   A method of rerouting a user from a selected service provider to an

2 alternate service provider, the method comprising:

3   giving the selected service provider an option of sending the user to a

4 database of service providers when the selected provider can not be reached;

5   searching the database for an alternate service provider that matches the

6 selected service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria; and

7   providing the user with a list of the matching alternate service providers.

1   58.   The method of claim 57, wherein the service provider is an

2 information provider.

1   59.   The method of claim 58, wherein the information provider's

2 information is provided in the form of a recorded transmission.

1   60.   The method of claim 58, wherein the information provider's

2 information is provided in the form of a communication with a live person.

1   61.   The method of claim 57, wherein the user can then select an alternate

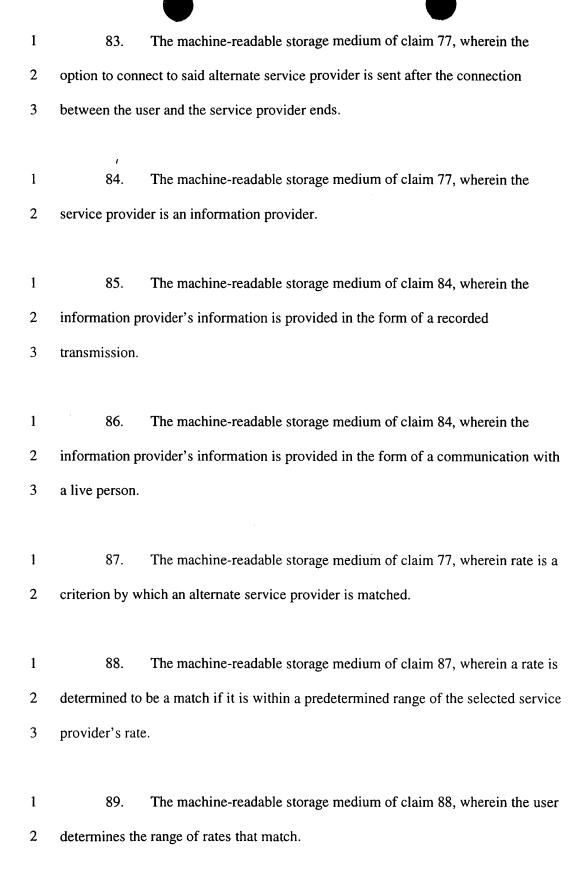2 service provider and be connected that provider.

1   62.   The method of claim 57, wherein the selected service provider

2   receives a pre-established percentage of any commission paid to the alternate service

3   provider.

1   63.   The method of claim 57, wherein the service provider is given the

2   option of sending the user to the database when the service provider creates the

3   initial listing with the system.

1   64.   The method of claim 63, wherein the default option is to send the

2   user to the database.

1   65.   The method of claim 57, wherein the selected service provider is

2   notified of the missed connection with the user.

1   66.   The method of claim 65, wherein the notice comes in the form of e-

2   mail.

1   67.   The method of claim 57, wherein rate is a criterion by which an

2   alternate service provider is matched.

1   68.   The method of claim 57, wherein a rate is determined to be a match if

2   it is within a predetermined range of the selected service provider's rate.

1   69.   The method of claim 57, wherein the user determines the range of

2   rates that match.

1   70.   The method of claim 57, wherein a system administrator determines

2   the range of rates that match.

1   71.   The method of claim 57, wherein subject matter is a criterion by

2   which an alternate service provider is matched.

1   72.   The method of claim 57, wherein a system administrator establishes

2   the criteria by which a match is determined.

1   73.   The method of claim 57, wherein the user establishes the criteria by

2   which a match is determined.

1   74.   The method of claim 57, wherein a combination of criteria is used to

2   determine a match.

1   75.   The method of claim 57, wherein only service providers that pass a

2   reliability criterion are considered.

1   76.   The method of claim 75, wherein reliability is determined based on a

2   ratio of the number of calls answered by a service provider to the number of calls

3   placed to the service provider.

1   77.   A machine-readable storage medium tangibly embodying a sequence

2   of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method comprising:

3   sending a user a list of service providers with their availability indicated;

4   receiving from the user a selection of a service provider;

5   attempting to establish real-time communications between the user and the

6   selected service provider; and

7   offering the user an option to connect to an alternate provider.

1   78.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the

2   selected service provider designates an alternate service provider in advance.

1   79.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, further including

2   searching a database of service providers for alternate providers who match the

3   selected service provider based on a pre-established set of criteria.

1   80.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the

2   connection established between the service provider and the user is a telephone

3   connection.

1   81.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the

2   connection established between the service provider and the user is an Internet

3   connection.

1   82.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the

2   · database is searched and information about an alternate service provider is sent only

3   if the user fails to connect to the selected service provider.

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1   83.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the

2   option to connect to said alternate service provider is sent after the connection

3   between the user and the service provider ends.

1   84.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the

2   service provider is an information provider.

1   85.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 84, wherein the

2   information provider's information is provided in the form of a recorded

3   transmission.

1   86.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 84, wherein the

2   information provider's information is provided in the form of a communication with

3   a live person.

1   87.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein rate is a

2   criterion by which an alternate service provider is matched.

1   88.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 87, wherein a rate is

2   determined to be a match if it is within a predetermined range of the selected service

3   provider's rate.

1   89.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 88, wherein the user

2   determines the range of rates that match.

1   90.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 88, wherein a system

2   administrator determines the range of rates that match.

1   91.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein subject

2   matter is a criterion by which an alternate service provider is matched.

1   92.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein a

2   combination of criteria is used to determine a match.

1   93.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein a system

2   administrator establishes the criteria by which a match is determined.

1   94.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein the user

2   establishes the criteria by which a match is determined.

1   95.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 77, wherein only

2   service providers that pass a reliability criterion are considered.

1   96.   The machine-readable storage medium of claim 95, wherein

2   reliability is determined based on a ratio of the number of calls answered by a

3   service provider to the number of calls placed to the service provider.

1   97.   A system for establishing a real-time communication connection

2   between two parties, the system comprising:

3   a communications interface; and

4   a controller computer linked with the communications interface, the

5   controller computer having:

6   a first logic unit to provide a list of service providers to a user, indicating the

7   availability of that provider;

8   a second logic unit to receive the user's selection of a service provider;

9   a third logic unit to attempt to establish a real-time communications

10   connection between the user and a selected service provider; and

11   a fourth logic unit to offer to reconnect the service provider to the user when

12   the service provider signals availability.

1   98.   The system of claim 97, wherein the fourth logic unit also offers a list

2   of alternate providers

1   99.   The system of claim 97, wherein the user can specify the method by

2   which the service provider is reconnected with the user.

1   100.   The system of claim 97, wherein the user can set a time limit on

2   when to reconnect the service provider.